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Designing Gender Inclusivity and Equality

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Abstract

In consideration of the labels and definitions of gender identities, and the differences in experience of stasis or fluidity of gender, this paper describes a role for design in the political activities of gender diversity inclusion and equality as a facilitator of open-minded debate and decision-making. The process of design in ‘enabling the improvement of qualities of life’, can positively transform the way we see, think and behave, and so, not only can it enable creation of products and services to support inclusive practices, it can also be socially innovative in developing new models and policies for inclusion and equality. One particular model is the Gender Cube, which enables individuals to dimensionally define and consider their gender identity rather than seek to fit to a category, labelled by society, with its incumbent expectations.

With consideration of both personal and social constructs of gender, experienced alone at home and socially in our cities, it is argued here that inclusion cannot be seen as simply an attitude of ‘not excluding’, but must actively develop coherence in both perspective and behaviour through mindful acceptance, integration and equality. The limitations of an androcentric, male dominant, binary model, and associated behaviours are discussed, including the need for a more balanced and credible engagement in supporting the design of gender inclusivity, for equality to be achieved for the expressions of the full range of gender identities.

KEYWORDS: Gender Fluidity, Dimensional Modelling, Body Image, Sexual Preference, Gender Behaviour.

Introduction

Design might be considered a *making* profession, suggesting a focus on creating physical artefacts, from clothing to vehicles, but in the last couple of decades, there has been an increased

appreciation that designers can also facilitate the development of new services. In addition, design researchers have shown us the capacity to inform and design new models and systems, and also to inform the development of new processes and policies and thus contribute to Social Innovation. In short it can now be argued that design, when engaged with positively, can be seen as an *improving* profession.

However, such development of design abilities is not simply about creative technique, but also the development of capabilities for critically investigating and understanding the interrelationship of complexities, in collaboration with others. It is rarely possible for a single person to fully understand a context and work effectively alone with a highly complex system. Designers succeed best through their facilitative management of open-minded creative project communities. It should also be understood that people as designers succeed least well in improving quality of life where they lack capacity or interest to creatively question accepted norms, whether that is how they continue to constrain themselves personally, e.g. at home; or professionally, e.g. in the wider context of the city.

The binary gender model and patriarchal society in the West has remained relatively unquestioned for the last 3000 years, (Monro, 2005), but in the last half century it has come under increasing question by the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, (LGBT) communities, who argue the inappropriateness of such an overly simplified approach to categorisation. Nevertheless, the binary model is difficult to move beyond because even discussions of alternatives are limited by our languages and cultures which often support the binary model and male domination. Discussions and actions can only stretch so far before risking losing credibility, because of possible conflicts between rational and emotional engagement, which makes cultural change so slow. This is especially the case where the emotive, phobic, perceptions within cultures have affected a tendency to 'otherise' and 'pathologise', for example, anyone who is not clearly male or clearly female, and heterosexual, (Bem, 1993). However, the blame for this should not purely be laid at the feet of men, as there is equality in this failure to improve. In a number of cultures there are women who perceive it as acceptable to be treated as inferior, in their perceived respect of men, and such acceptance of imbalance helps maintain those cultures. As a further challenge to inclusive practices many LGBT individuals and groups argue against inclusion of others in their activities, for instance Lesbians and Gays see themselves a very separate and do not want to be simply categorised together as Homosexual. There are even cases of Biphobia among some Lesbians and Gays having little trust of Bisexuals wishing to join their groups, because they see them as loose and do not see shared interests as sufficient to warrant inclusion, (Monro, 2005). Being easy to categorise is clearly important for many individuals to declare their position, yet the meaning of these categories can be perceived differently by people, in forming judgements about other individuals.

Simplification through the categorisation, framing and labelling of identity, is a common approach, which may quickly lead to tight communities of like-minded individuals, with a drive to conform to label expectations, but unavoidably develop exclusionary behaviours. Those who are

excluded may become misunderstood, through too little contact to inform, and then the potential fear of the unknown may develop dislikes and phobias e.g. homophobia and transphobia.

What needs to be appreciated is that while there is an emotional desire to understand in order to accept one another, in reality we must rationally override possible negative emotions, and accept people first, in order to develop an understanding. Nevertheless, there are many types of individual who will never be fully understood by others, in some cases because these individuals do not fully understand themselves. For example, within the broader category of 'transvestites', where there are sub-categories of those who dress like: young women, their mothers, sissy-dressers, prostitutes; each may have little understanding of what draws the others to dress the way they do, only accept that they do. This is little different from people not appreciating what is attractive about every person who they see is in a relationship. For gender inclusion to work, with active equality, it has to work with priority upon acceptance above understanding, where through acceptance and engagement some improved understanding may be possible.

Acceptance will still require the use of labels however, to facilitate credible communication. The complete abandonment of labels, for a genderless society, would logically result in a loss of frame of reference of the individuality, and also of the sense of belonging. People commonly need to feel part of a definable and structured group, not just one of humankind, but in defining individuality there will need to be references to a number of coherent aspects of self, which are meaningful to self and certain others. Hierarchies are commonly noted within these social group categories. It has been described by Monro (2005), that even when gender politics have supported diversity through broader categorisations, signs are found of struggles for dominance, suggesting a continued need for a power structure, for credibility.

Without credibility the benefit in interrelationships is not apparent and so interactions and change would not take place. Radical social innovation risks perceptions of incredibility. As we learn more about social complexities, we can also get locked into analysis-paralysis through a need to know more to confidently inform our decision-making, leading to information overload. There is therefore an argument for simplicity, in order to deal with such complexities; to design and to take a series of incremental social innovations towards understanding sufficiently to improve upon our quality of life.

For simplicity we need to work as closely as possible with a common language, as a starting point, to apply a world-view model that is easy to visualise and to navigate. For this to work effectively the '*we*' must include the designer in all of us, not simply appointed design practitioners, to enable communities to engage in 'designing with' rather than any practitioners 'designing for'. The design practitioner's role is then appreciated as the facilitator of improvements, contracted by organisations and communities.

Designing a New Model of Gender

Hilton (2006), considered the complexities of gender and how gender might be modelled in order to facilitate more open discussion and understanding of gender identities. This involved the investigation of a number of approaches to modelling gender, from maps and matrixes, to circumplex models. These models were categorical, which would be fine for gender static individuals, but for gender fluid individuals, (Irigaray, 1995; O'Keefe, 1999) this can result in the experience of switching or 'box-hopping', not allowing for 'degrees of change' and by the interpretations of labels could sound like indecisiveness rather than fluidity through change across contexts over time, which may then affect individual's interrelationships with one another.

Monro, (2005), proposed a concentric circumplex model of gender diversity which attempted to position the main gender categories. (See figure 1). It is possible to register finer categories of gender with such two dimensional models, but it is argued not with the degree of flexibility that it is possible to express through any dimensional model.

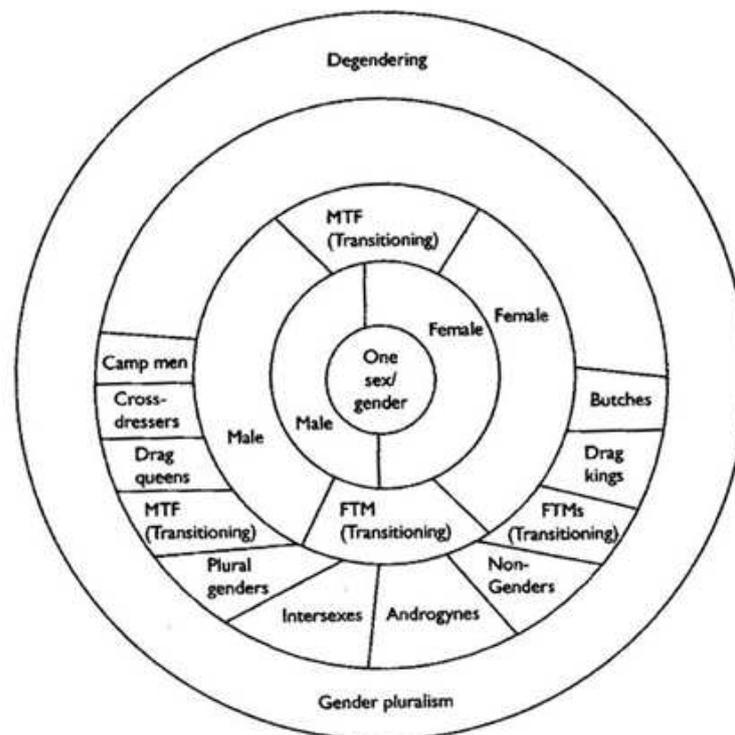


Figure 1 - A Concentric Circumplex Model of Gender Diversity. (Monro, 2005).

A model was developed using three scale bars, (See figure 2), to record individual experiences in relation to the extremes of each dimension. Once a range is placed on each of these three scales they can then be registered onto the Gender Cube to give a snapshot view of the individual's identity volume within a specific time and context. (See figure 3).

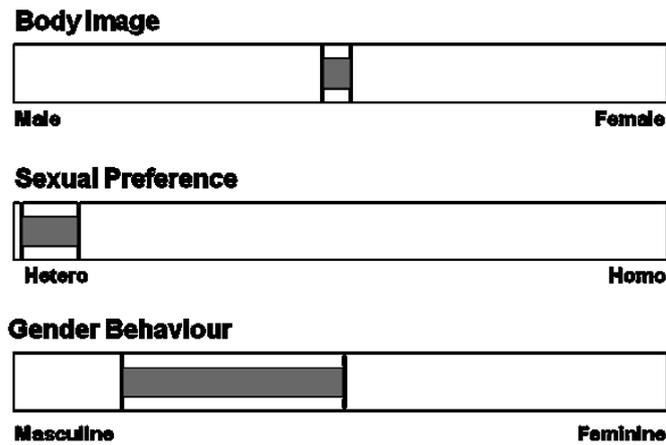


Figure 2 - The 3 Dimensions of Gender, as range scales.

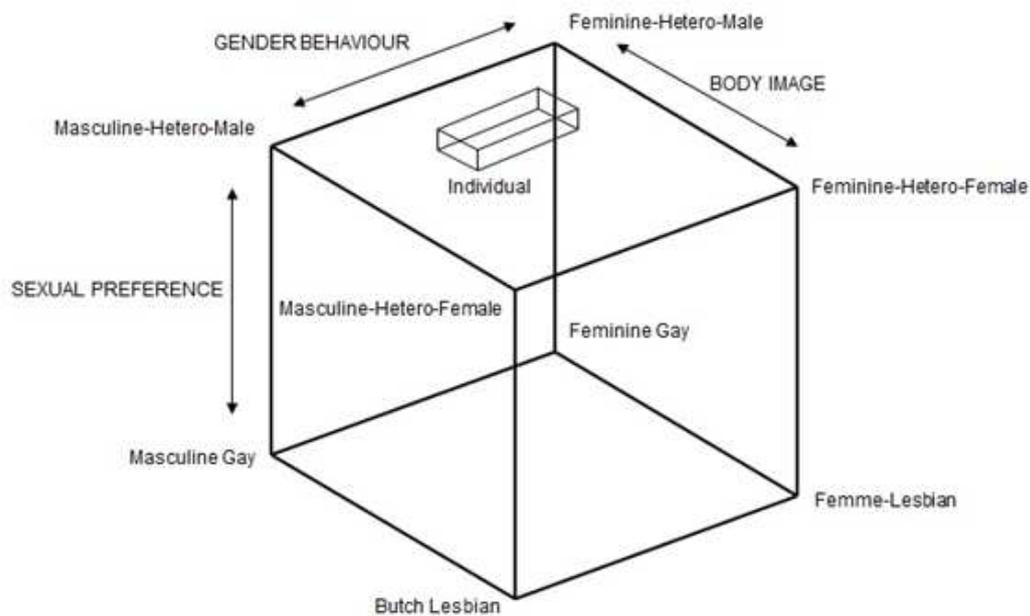


Figure 3 - The Gender Cube, version 3.

If the experience of gender is recorded over time in a number of different contexts it would be possible for the individual to determine whether they are generally gender static or fluid across one or more dimensions. (See figure 4). This enables discussion around gender to be broadened from how the individual defines and relates to gender categories, to how they may experience gender as a static or fluid aspect of their identity, and the meaning of this to quality of life, in terms of their self-perceptions and interrelationships, e.g. at home and at work.

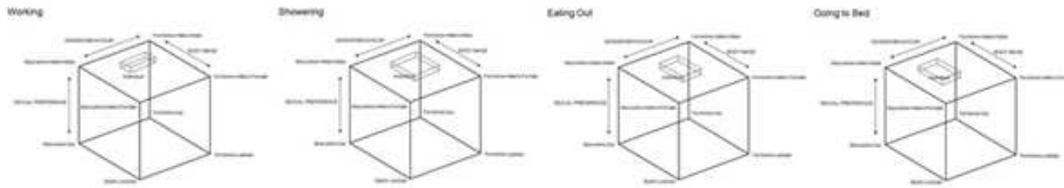


Figure 4 – Fluidity of Gender Identity across contexts.

Body Image

This term relates to the cultural perceptions and meaning of physical maleness or femaleness, of both the genotype and phenotype of the individual, in the context of personal and social expectations of what we were born as, to how our body looks through physical development or manipulation. This dimension might include extremes of: hairiness, defined musculature, individuals with a large penis; to opposite extremes of large breasts, child-bearing hips, clear skin complexion, and lack of body hair.

The middle ground would include those referred to as Intersex because they have a combination of male and female genitals and other parts from birth; also there are types of transsexuals referred to as Genderfucks, (Whittle, 2002), who have undergone hormonal treatment and some operative procedures for sex change but have found great comfort at the halfway stage, e.g. having breasts and a penis, and have chosen to make no further change. There are also those in the middle ground who are unlike either extreme in that they do not have fully developed genitalia, or have been subjected to castration or other form of genital mutilation for example.

Between middle ground and either extreme there will be the much more common and less extreme characteristics, such as lack of body muscle and smaller penis size, and poor skin complexion and body hair. But over time movement may be possible here, for example as transsexuals undertake gender confirmation.

It should be noted that for some individuals there can be a difference between physical appearance as perceived by others, and what the individual perceives when they see themselves in a mirror. Grogan (1999), described examples of body image problems where people have become quite disturbed as a result of mental discrepancies over body image, causing some of them to develop maladaptive behaviours. Many of us may have lesser degrees of body image discrepancy, seeing ourselves as more feminine or masculine than others may see us.

Sexual Preference

Sexuality as an area of study refers broadly to sexual relationships in terms of sexual behaviours and sexual preferences. A more complete model of sexual behaviour would need to include dimensions for: dominant and submissive; vanilla and perverted; sadistic and masochistic; monogamous and polygamous; celibate and promiscuous; as well as heterosexual and homosexual. This would require a whole other model to facilitate deeper discussions specifically around sexual behaviours and sexual identity.

Sexual preference, in the Gender Cube is therefore limited to the most commonly referenced aspect of sexuality, heterosexual/homosexual, with middle ground including bisexual, and those who have been referred to as metrosexual because they could be comfortable partnering a straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transsexual individual. Sexual Fluidity, (Diamond, 2008), may be more apparent here for those individuals who have needs for varied partner relationships. The middle ground on sexual preference would also accommodate those individuals whose experience is unlike either extreme and so would include asexual individuals.

Between the middle ground and the extremes the individuals may experience considerations or fantasies of attraction to people of the opposite or same sex but might feel no desire to act upon those thoughts. People would commonly reside around middle ground and the extremes.

Gender Behaviour

Gender behaviour is separate to sexual behaviour in that it is the performativity (Butler, 1993) of socially interpreted signals of gender, created and transmitted to hide, or confirm, an individual's gender identity. For example, a homosexual may act heterosexual to avoid anticipated conflict within their professional or social community; or an openly feminine homosexual male may behave camp with the intention of attracting interest from particular compatible individuals.

In addition to body language and speech, choice of clothing is a major factor in the intended performativity of gender, though it should be understood that these signals are not interpreted the same by all individuals. Presently we have limited categorical references to gendered dress, and for cultures and societies that have a preference for use of identity labels this can cause some misunderstandings. It is proposed here that the term cross-dressing would be better used specifically to identify those individuals who feel the need to dress as opposite or other only at certain times. For those who consistently dress as more feminine or masculine than their social norm it would be incorrect to suggest they are crossing to or beyond their socially perceived gender. Such people are more likely to be expressing their self-perception, and might be more inclusively labelled with the majority, as me-dressers, as they are 'just being me.' It can be argued that me-dressers would have to include all static-dressers, i.e. the transsexual people as well as people who have not even questioned their gender; and also include the fluid-dressers (see figure

5.) whose clothing might change across context in keeping with their sense of me-ness, (Schultz-Kleine, et al, 1995).

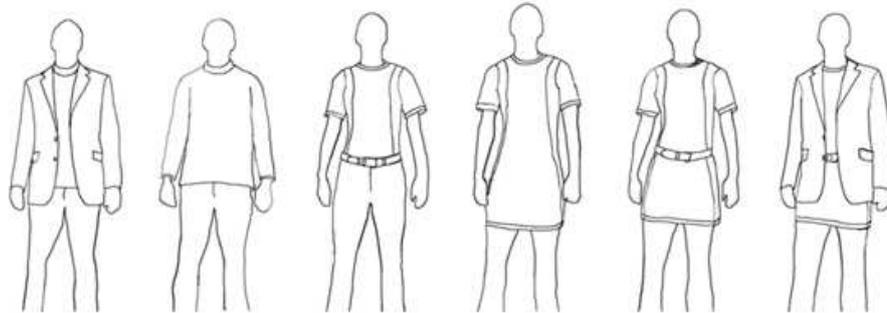


Figure 5 – Gender Adjustable Ensembles.

For the dimensional simplicity of the Gender Cube the individual has to distil their range of Gender Behaviour from these above considerations in reference to their femininity and masculinity. Extremes of femininity for example might relate to the wearing of softer lighter materials, and behaving more caring and sharing in certain contexts; whereas masculinity might relate to the wearing of tougher heavier materials, and behaving more competitive and aggressive in certain contexts. The middle ground would then have to include the unisex and the genderless behaviours and modes of dress; whereas between the middle ground and the extremes we would see the culturally more common or conforming behaviours and modes of dress.

Individual use of the Gender Cube

It is suggested that an individual wishing to investigate their gender experiences in private, possibly at home, may engage with the Gender Cube in the following way:

1. Starting with the 3 Dimensions of Gender, (refer to figure 2), the individual should question whether the labels at the extremes of each dimension: Body Image, Sexual Preference, and Gender Behaviour, relate to their personal experience of gender. If one or more labels do not relate well the labels would first need changing to what is appropriate. But users also need to question how they are interpreting the labels. While some people may never mentally register attractiveness of their own sex this does not mean that homosexuality may not be an appropriate extreme label for sexuality.
2. Next, turning to the Gender Cube, if changes have been made to the dimension labels on the scales they must also be changed on the cube, which will likely require changes to the related corner 'extremes'.

3. For each of the 8 corner references the individual should define their perceptions of these 'extreme' types, as brief persona descriptors. Assumptions should be avoided wherever possible, considering evidence of behavioural characteristics over belief.
4. Next, returning to the 3 Dimensions of Gender scales and considering their relation to the dimensions extremes, the individual should determine the range on the scale they are experiencing at that moment in time. (Refer to figure 2.)
5. The ranges from the 3 scales may then be translated into the Gender Cube, to determine the individual's proportional volume and position, for their gender identity experience at that moment in time.
6. Steps 3 and 4 should then be repeated over a period of days, capturing gender experiences in a range of different contexts and environments, for example: working, showering, eating out, going to bed, (Refer to figure 4.)
7. The proportional volumes and positions of gender identity may then be compared in the Gender Cube, which could identify whether the individual is gender static, or experiences a degree of gender fluidity between certain contexts.
8. The meaning of the gender stasis or fluidity, in relation to certain contexts may then be considered in terms of quality of life improvements.

This exercise can also be carried out with a counsellor, so that the Gender Cube acts as a facilitation device to enable deeper discussions and understandings to be achieved in terms of themselves and/or their family/social relationships. To better facilitate discussions of relationships it would be possible to place couples or families into the same cube to discuss the meaning of overlaps and separations.

Group use of the Gender Cube

It is anticipated that the Gender Cube would more commonly be used by individuals. Nevertheless, in the interests of designing in more social contexts, the guidance below describes group work, for instance in designing products, processes, policies, and services, which may relate to contexts of our homes and our cities, in the following way:

1. Begin as a group, by defining with evidence, the perceptions of the target population which the group will be involved with.
2. Turning to the 3 Dimensions of Gender scales, (refer to figure 2), they should first question whether the labels at the extremes of each dimension: Body Image, Sexual Preference, and Gender Behaviour, relate to the target population, taking care to also discuss their interpretation of the labels. If one or more labels do not relate well they would first need changing to what is appropriate.

3. Next, turning to the Gender Cube, if changes have been made to the scales dimension labels they must also be changed on the cube, which will likely require changes to the related corner 'extremes'.
4. For each of the 8 corner references the group must discuss and define their perceptions of these 'extreme' types, as brief persona descriptors. Assumptions should be avoided wherever possible, considering evidence of behavioural characteristics.
5. Next, returning to the 3 scales, the group must consider the target population's relation to the dimensions extremes, and determine the range on the scale that this population is anticipated to be experiencing at an agreed time and context. (Refer to figure 2.)
6. The ranges from the 3 scales may then be translated into the Gender Cube, to determine this population's proportional volume and position, for their gender identity experience at that moment in time and context.
7. Steps 4 and 5 can then be considered for a range of different contexts and environments for the target population, for example: working, showering, eating out, going to bed, (Refer to figure 4.)
8. The proportional volumes and positions of the target population's gender identity may then be compared and this will identify whether they are to be considered generally gender static, or to experience a degree of gender fluidity.
9. The meaning of the gender stasis or fluidity, in relation to certain contexts may then be considered in terms of quality of life improvements.

Once target populations/markets have been defined and placed, they may be compared within the same cube to consider the meaning of possible overlaps or separations and how this informs design considerations.

At the time of writing this, an Android Mobile App is being developed of the Gender Cube to facilitate this gender modelling research in applying this approach and generating case studies and other data. It is hoped that after initial trials this app will be made more widely available for individual and group use.

Designing Policies for Gender Inclusion and Equality

The above approaches to questioning the quality of gender experiences across time and contexts will better inform the understanding of individuality and gender identity, and better support the development, credibility, and agreement of improved policies for gender inclusion and equality. Nevertheless we can start to question the inclusiveness and equality in the content and language

of our organisational and social policies in a move to improve our rights and quality of life. Monro (2005) has noted a social policy proposing mechanism for community inclusion:

1. *The creation of 'other' categories on forms and documents.*
2. *The recognition of socially viable categories for people who wish to identify as other than male or female – particularly intersex people, who are born 'other' and might chose to identify as intersex if it was socially possible. This would involve significant changes to a whole raft of legislative and statutory procedures.*
3. *Depathologisation of all forms of gender variance (including intersex, transsexuality, multiple genders, and transvestism) and the development of strategies to enable access to treatment with minimal pathologisation, where treatment is necessary for conditions relating to gender variance.*
4. *The naming of intersex, androgynes, gender fluid, gender plural, and polysexual on equalities documents and strategies.*
5. *Governmental pressure on community groups to be inclusive of people with non-male/ non-female identities and non-binariied sexualities (for example funding to be tied to inclusive policies).*
6. *Statutory resources to support the equality of non-male/ non-female people, for example funding to work in central government concerning these groups.*
7. *Legislation to support relationships between people of non-binariied genders, and those between a man or a woman and a person who identifies as androgynous, intersex, or gender diverse in other ways.*
8. *The cessation of operations on intersex people that are unnecessary for physical functioning, unless individuals wish for these (as above).*
9. *Continued provision of surgery and hormone therapy for transsexuals where wanted, but also the provision of alternative options such as non-operative reassignment – and the provision of full equal rights for trans people who do not wish to have surgery, or who identify as other than male or female after surgery.*
10. *Full social support for men who wish to wear attire traditionally associated with females (including legislation to prevent discrimination).*
11. *Educational and anti-discriminatory initiatives aimed at tackling ignorance and prejudice towards people of other genders. (Monro, 2005, p. 87)*

It is suggested here that for a general social policy such as Monro's it would be good to develop further, to include greater detail as to how this policy will be acted upon by a particular organisation or community. A possible further development of Monro's policy proposal could be the addition of: The reconsideration and revision of certain common labels to reduce negative implications. For example the term 'straight' is used for heterosexual, though not negative in itself it implies a negative of 'bent' for other than heterosexual. While the term 'bent' is little used now, in favour of lesbian, gay, queer, etc, the implication remains; and the term cross-dresser should be used more specifically as already discussed, for those with the need to dress as other

than themselves. Most importantly as a guide, labels should not be created *for* others, but *with* common agreement of like individuals.

Credibility

For the Gender Cube, and discussions around dimensional modelling of gender, and designing for gender diversity inclusion and equality, there is a need to develop and maintain credibility through critical presentation and review of concepts and practices. There are two major influences upon credibility, and they are ignorance and power. Ignorance can be maintained through poor feedback about thoughts and behaviours. Without credibility the common response is to ignore or reduce communication, thus maintaining the ignorance of such individuals or groups. Power is held by those with credible capacities to *give* or to *take*, acknowledging that the majority *exchange*. But those with power are not necessarily wise. In order to maintain power for competitive advantage natural creative abilities may be used to build upon assumptions with stories that serve these individual's ends. Sometimes group acceptance of individual imaginings can be read as confirmation of truth: The belief that the Earth is flat and the Sun circles the Earth; The assumption that men who wear dresses are out to attract advances from gay men, when in actual fact many gay men are particularly attracted to men in suit and tie.

Social group ignorance can make it easier to create credibility of falsity, especially if there is a credible storyteller and no alternative for counter consideration. But as people gain wisdom through new ways of seeing, thinking and doing, only the very well evidenced propositions of fact are likely to remain credible.

The binary model of gender has remained credible in a number of cultures for thousands of years because until the advent of television and the internet, ignorance of somewhat taboo subjects has been considerable, and the intimidating fear of ignorant responses has kept quiet those who have had alternative experiences. Now that we are gaining a greater understanding of gender diversity the binary model has become less credible. Nevertheless it continues to be held to, simplifying the administration of society and its cultures, by those in power.

The process of designing the Gender Cube has sought to increase credibility through aligning with agreed perceptions and terminology in gender studies, and by promotion through international conferences. Feedback through discussion has enabled a number of improvements to enable easier and more effective engagement with the model. It is important to balance credibility in the writing and physical demonstration of the model. For example, to raise discussion around gender fluidity the author considered attending the Include 2011 conference in full role-play, as role-play was an aspect of investigation covered in the paper, but he decided that for some he may instantly lose credibility before the presentation got underway, which he did not want to do, so limited himself to wearing pink nail varnish to be provocative. The intended debate point concerning the pink nail varnish was, some men wear floral print shirts, some ear-

rings, some wear black nail varnish, why not make coloured nail varnish more commonly acceptable for men? While many people the author spoke to could see a credible argument to the wearing of the nail varnish for the conference presentation, many could not see a credible argument to continued wearing, as self-expression was not understood to be benefit in itself.

In 2012 the author's public presentation of 'Can we change our minds about gender?' at the Newcastle Science Festival, involved an on-stage transformation from masculine to feminine. This was reported to have been experienced as a very credible part of the design of the event, in enabling the audience to consider the rational and emotional experience of gender.

Nevertheless, as Suthrell (2004) suggested, certain forms of self-expression and equality behaviours, even where women are considered to be of equal status to men, is still seen as less credible if it is a man seeking equality for feminine strengths and freedoms. It is proposed here that credibility might be developed over time through social and organisational policy changes, but would require greater male commitment, for little masculine benefit. However, there are indications that changes are afoot within education and society for the acceptance and understanding of gender fluidity in children, (Padawer, 2012).

Conclusion

It is argued that a design process which applies a dimensional, as opposed to categorical, model of gender to policy development, alongside the likes of Monro's policy proposing mechanism, (Monro, 2005), to further question perceptions and equality, will provide greater opportunities to enable acceptance and understanding to develop. To review a particular organisation or community, it is advised that developed persona descriptors are used to critically review and improve the organisation/community inclusion and equality policies.

Version 3 of the Gender Cube offers a more intuitive understanding of gender identities, in their relationship to Body Image, Sexual Preference, and especially Gender Behaviour, in its recognition of cultural differences and their languages of gender. The model and engagement processes described offer an awareness raising opportunity for considering others as well as our own gender identity, and the stasis or fluidity of the experience, to inform improvements in quality of life through possible new me-centred behaviours and relationships, both professional and social. If such a model and way of thinking about gender can be more widely adopted and positively influence our languages and cultures, we should see evidence of improvements in product and service facilitated performativity and interactions in terms of gender in the home and in our cities. This could see active changes to social and professional dress-code; more open and expressive approaches to cocooning in the home; new approaches to internet-dating; enable services like Relate to deepen meaning between couples in discussion of their experiences of gender; possibly identify ways of dealing with certain socio-emotional imbalances of hate crimes; and through sex-education improve individuals self-esteem.

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